

A Development of an Experiential Self

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Abstract: *Is there a self over and above experiencing? When we try to express our experience through words, there appears a subject and its object. Can our experience be articulated without this subject-object structure? Anyhow, experiencing and talking about experience are not same. As students of philosophy, we do the latter, but as human beings we do the former. We live through our experience. Experiencing provides an opportunity to relate to others. This experiencing gradually helps to develop a notion of self which involves others.*

One way of talking about self is to talk about the subject of our experience. But there is another way to narrate self which is feeling the experienced self which emerges with our experience and a dynamic one. In different domains of human knowledge, thinkers talk about 'self', e.g. literature, philosophy, social science etc. But all these talks do not have the same orientation and goal. Here I would like to talk about a self, which develops with time and experience. This experience rooted self is not contaminated by any theorization. I would like to talk about the development of a pre-theoretical self which is not notional but experiential.

Keywords: experiencing, self, pre-theoretical, time, others, dynamic

In this paper, my aim is to probe into some of my experiences and make an effort to find out what role these experiences play in determining my-self. In philosophical literature there are different theories of self. Many of these theories claim that there is a substantive self over and above fleeting experiences as a unifying principle. According to such theories, self is taken to be a subject of experiences. But there are other views in which it is said that such a notion of self only takes into account the cognitive aspect which is admitted to be the function of self. But does self only function as a cognitive agent? In analytic tradition, mostly, self is taken to be a cognitive or moral agent, which helps to determine it as subject of cognition or action.

But there are other ways to understand *self*. Here I would propose to talk about some of those other ways which present an engaged self and not a detached one before us.

A self is identified by continuous *becoming*. After my birth I become a 'daughter'. This is a relation I acquire with my parents from the time of my birth. So, I say that I am a daughter. When I say 'I am a daughter', it does not merely refer to a relation, but also indicates who am I. So, this relation of 'being daughter' in a way constitutes my-self. Daughterhood consists of certain experiences which uniquely determine my-self. But it is not a fixed, time-bound set of experiences. It is open ended and developing.

As a child I used to have high fevers and often had it during my annual exams at school. During those days my mother used to read aloud from text books and I used to listen to those and prepare my study accordingly. That experience of learning from my mother in the above way constitutes my unique self of being a *daughter*. In other words, those particular experiences constitute me as a daughter who is different from all other daughters of the world. Again, from my childhood I used to share everything with my mother and she reciprocates. This has helped to develop a bond between us which is still continuing and developing my-self.

During my school days I often had conversations with my father regarding various topics, specially about our heritage, our freedom struggle, our epics and culture, our philosophy. All those conversations were those experiences which constitute me as a daughter having regards for my country's culture and heritage. I started loving my country and adoring it. These childhood experiences by constituting a unique *daughterhood* determine *my-self* as an ever developing one. My father always listened to my responses very intently and gave due importance to those. Those attentions make me a confident speaker which I think contribute to my being.

After my marriage I become a wife. From then on 'I am a wife.' My *wifehood* being constituted by my relationship with my husband evolves with time. From the beginning my husband takes special care to make me aware of my identity as a researcher. So, my being of wife is very closely connected to my being a researcher of philosophy. I put my effort to be a researcher of philosophy along with a wife. Our relationship as a couple has been shaped by many factors, but among those the most prominent one is our doing research together. This *wifehood* is a unique one which also is shaping and evolving with time.

Now by being a mother I am also developing day by day. I am writing this paper in order to share my thoughts with you. My nine years old daughter share her time with time of my professional work. Being a mother, I always appreciate such considerations from her part which gives me immense strength from within. Me as a mother is the most fulfilling experience for me and I am developing with it.

All these above determinations, such as 'being daughter', 'being wife' and 'being mother' constitute my-*self* and this *self* is a continuous process of development spreads out in time.

We find the corroboration of the above position in the following lines of Jesus Adrian Escudero in which he mentions Heidegger's understanding of self, in his article, 'Heidegger and Selfhood'¹ as thus: 'Being and Time demands that the reader undergo for him- or herself his or her own journey of self-discovery...'

According to Escudero this is very clear in Heidegger's early Freiburg lectures that if someone would like to determine the *self*, one should start looking to our worldly experiences instead of searching inside our consciousness for some kind of abstract I.² For Heidegger our experiential life is world related. In other words, my self is an experiential self and it is not a private subject detached from my interaction with the world. On the other hand, it develops with the interaction with the world and so it is not merely a cognitive subject but very much situated in my interaction with the world. A person's life cannot be understood through the framework of subject object dichotomy. Thus, it is not a life of a isolated subject who is detached and dissociated from the world. But life of a self is immersed in the world with which the self- interacts continuously.

Heidegger holds and Escudero states '...experience myself immediately in what I do and in what I accomplish, in my concerns and in my relations with others...'³

Self is neither constituted by cognitive relations directed towards the past, nor by actions fulfilled in the present. It is integrated in the network of practical and productive relationships projected towards the future. For Heidegger self is always open and developing towards the future.

In the above narration I also liked to state that My-self is developing with experiences which have a temporal direction towards future. Temporal passage lays the structure which contains our experiences in such manner which is taken to be the experiential self.

In Heideggerian view we come across such an open-ended self which continuously develops with experience. For Heidegger self (being) is in the world. Heidegger uses the term *Dasain* to refer to *being –in-the-world*. He says ‘I experience myself immediately in what I do and in what I accomplish, in my concerns and in my relations with others...’ he says further ‘...*Dasein* itself is also discovered in its immediate caring involvement with the things and people that surrounds it...’⁷⁴

The open-ended nature of *Dasain* is understood from the following lines of Heidegger. ‘...*Dasein* is always already beyond itself, not as a way of behaving toward beings which it is *not*, but as being toward the potentiality-for-being which it itself is.’⁷⁵ Here we come across *Dasain* as *being-in-the-world* which is open to future. Here we come across the *self* which develops with dimension of time. This *temporality* of *self* is an important aspect which I would like to stress in my experiential account also.

This open-ended nature of *self* is also found in the classical Indian tradition. The etymological meaning of *âtma* (the term standing for self) is *atyeti*, *vyâpnoti*- means to overflow and to spread.

Thus, in classical Indian tradition also *self* is not taken to be a static, private entity which can be known only in abstraction. It is related to the world and others and it goes beyond its boundary and engulfs other within itself. In some of the philosophical schools of classical India, philosophers have made a distinction between empirical self which is related to our experiences and a detached self which is beyond any experience. But for us the empirical self is only amenable as the other one is posited beyond any conceptual structure.

The experiential self which I have tried to depict through my personal experiences is an evolving one. In this paper, I have tried to show that continental philosopher Heidegger as well as in classical Indian tradition *self* has been determined as an evolving one which develops with our experience and open ended. This open-ended nature of self is different from the notion of self which is confined to the present also.

Those who seek to provide *present* a special status over and above *past* and *future* are eager to confine self within the boundary of *present*. This is a dogma of modernity which has been critiqued by Heidegger. He provides much importance on *future* and thereby seeks to locate the *self* in *future*. Thus, in Heideggerian view we not only come across a novel interpretation of *self* but also find a new understanding of *temporality*. All through his writing Heidegger shows the intimate connection between *Dasein*, i.e.

‘being-in-the-world’ and *temporality*. *Dasein* always exists in advance of itself. Its involvements with the world can only be understood in terms of its directedness towards the future. It is grounded in past and directed towards the future. So, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is stretched in temporality and not confined within a fixed locus of present.

Notes

1. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4 No. 2; February 2014, p. 6.
2. Jesús Adrián Escudero, Heidegger on Selfhood, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4 No. 2; February 2014, p.11.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Heidegger, S. pp. 191-192/BT, p. 185. Further, see Ernst Tugendhat, *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstbestimmung*(Frankfurt, 1979), p. 177, and Georg W. Bertram, “Die Einheit des SelbstnachHeidegger,”*DeutscheZeitschriftfür, Philosophie* 61 (2013), pp. 203-204.

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